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ABSTRACT

To evaluate the job market for college graduates in the field of broadcast news, a study was designed to provide an up-to-date assessment of turnover and staff sources and to ascertain the number of job openings over a one-year period, as well as the sources of people hired for those positions in various types of broadcast news operations. Questionnaires were mailed to all 635 nonsatellite commercial television stations and a sample of 940 commercial radio stations; 68% of the television and 49% of the radio news operations responded. Results were categorized by market and region. The study revealed that turnover rates were lowest in major markets and highest in the smaller market categories; that, of those hired in the preceding 12 months, about a fourth for television and third for radio were just out of school; that television stations in the top 50 markets hired a lower percentage of their newcomers directly from college; that regional differences were minor, with the midwest the most receptive to graduates; and that the majority of hiring of recent graduates was done by a relatively small number of stations. (MAI)

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BROADCAST NEWS STAFF SOURCES AND TURNOVER: IMPLICATIONS FOR EDUCATORS

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Broadcast journalism students come to educators for advice as to where realistically to seek their first jobs upon graduation. The advice given must depend to a large extent upon the aspirations and abilities of particular job candidates. But a major factor to be considered is the readiness of various types of news operations to hire beginners. In this connection, it is helpful to know the rate at which entry-level positions come open in television and radio news operations in small, medium, large and major markets.

The profession is one with high turnover. Fulmer and Bensman summarize studies which have estimated that a fifth to a third of the men and women who work in television change jobs during the course of a year.[1] In broadcast news specifically, a 1976 survey by Stone found news directors saying that staff members typically left a station after two years in radio or three years in TV news. The smaller the market, the sooner they moved on. The typical stay for TV newspersons was four years in major markets, three in moderately large and two years in medium-populated markets. For radio, the median was three years in major and large markets, two in medium and small markets. The news directors themselves had typically been on their jobs only two to three years.[2]

The turnover rate has been increasing. Broadcasting leaders often cite a modest 10 percent figure, but that comes from a 1962

survey. Upward of a third is shown by more recent studies.[3] News directors in 1972 had typically been on their jobs one year or more longer than those surveyed four years later.[4]

The higher turnover rate may be detrimental to the news product because of lowered stability and continuity of the news teams which put the programs together. And moving around so much may militate against job satisfaction for the many staff members who would like to put down roots in one place and keep them there. However, high turnover works to at least the short-term advantage of those hundreds of young aspirants who leave the campuses to look for radio and TV news jobs each year. Faster turnover means more job openings.

But how many of these openings are for applicants who are just getting out of school? A survey by Harless and Collins in the early 1970s found that 20 percent of the TV news personnel hired in a 12-month period had come fresh from college broadcast journalism training. The study also found less hiring of these entry-level applicants by the larger news operations.[5] Stone and Hayes, in a separate national survey about the same time, asked news directors where they usually got new members of their staffs. With multiple responses accepted, "just out of school" was checked by 43 percent, as against 77 percent checking "other stations," the favorite source among news directors in all market sizes. The smaller the market, the better the job chances for those persons just getting out of school.[6]

Similar results for radio as well as television were obtained by Stone and Hoyt in 1976. News directors were asked: "Where do you get

most of your news personnel?" Again it was "other stations" first with "colleges and universities" a strong second both for TV and radio. About a third of the radio operations and a sixth in TV were also drawing upon broadcast trade schools and such other sources as newspapers, disc jockeys and persons sometimes referred to as being hired "off the street." As in other studies, major markets were found less likely to have jobs for fresh graduates.[7]

The present study was designed: 1) to provide an up-to-date assessment of turnover and staff sources, and 2) to fill gaps left by previous studies by ascertaining the number of openings over a one-year period and the sources of people hired for those positions at various kinds of broadcast news operations.

METHOD

Data were gathered as part of a larger study conducted in fall of 1977 for the Radio Television News Directors Association. Questionnaires were mailed to all 635 non-satellite commercial TV stations and a sample of 940 commercial radio stations with working addresses in Broadcasting Yearbook. Two mailings brought responses from 68 percent (432) of the TV and 49 percent (458) of the radio news operations.

TV stations were categorized by market size according to ADI (Area of Dominant Influence) ranks. Radio stations were categorized by market population: major, 1-million or more; large, 250,000 to 1-million; medium, 50,000 to 250,000; and small-market, 50,000 or less.

Stations were assigned to regional categories by the use of standard U.S. census classifications.

RESULTS

The personnel turnover rates for the 12-month period ending in late 1977 were roughly one-fourth for television and one-third for radio news. Table 1 shows that television news staffs averaged a total of just over 17 persons, with four-plus openings during the year. Because the questionnaire items on openings did not ask for distinction between full-time and part-time staff, the rate is calculated from staff figures including an average of one and a-half part-timers in the total of 17. The average radio news staff consisted of about two full-timers and one part-timer, with one opening during the 12 months.

As is regularly the case in such surveys, the averages (means) are greater than the medians in most categories because a few stations are far ahead of all others in activities and budgets. This boosts the arithmetic averages but has little effect on the distributions of stations from which medians are calculated. In late 1977, the median was about four persons less than the mean for television and one less for radio. The typical (median) TV news staff consisted of about 11 full-time and two part-time persons, while radio typically had one full-timer and one part-timer. Means are used throughout the present report because this approach lends itself more effectively to calculations and comparisons of rates.

Both for television and radio, turnover rates were lowest in major markets and highest in the smaller market categories, with little difference across the medium to large market classifications.

TABLE 1

Mean Broadcast News Staff Size in Late 1977, Openings During Previous 12 Months and Turnover Rate, by Market Size and Region

	Staff Size					
	Full-time	Part-time	Total	Openings for Year	Turnover Rate	Number of Cases
Television	15.7	1.6	17.3	4.2	24%	428
ADI 1-10	32.7	2.1	34.8	5.6	16%	31
ADI 11-50	24.8	2.0	26.8	5.4	20%	106
ADI 51-100	14.5	1.8	16.3	4.4	27%	113
ADI 101-150	8.6	1.6	10.2	3.2	31%	108
ADI 151-206	6.4	.2	6.6	3.0	45%	60
East	16.8	1.7	18.5	3.6	19%	57
South	15.9	1.5	17.4	4.6	26%	146
Midwest	15.9	2.0	17.9	4.2	23%	131
West	14.3	1.1	15.4	4.2	27%	94
Radio	1.8	1.2	3.0	1.0	33%	458
Major Mkt.	4.1	1.7	5.8	1.3	22%	63
Large Mkt.	2.4	1.4	3.8	1.3	34%	88
Medium Mkt.	1.5	1.1	2.6	1.0	30%	157
Small Mkt.	.8	1.1	1.9	.8	42%	150
East	2.3	1.6	3.9	1.4	36%	88
South	1.9	1.0	2.9	1.0	34%	141
Midwest	1.7	1.3	3.0	1.0	33%	141
West	1.4	1.4	2.8	1.0	36%	88

Stations in the top 10 TV markets had openings equalling only a sixth of their average 35-member staffs during the year. But the bottom tier (ADI 151-206) stations averaged nearly half as many openings during the year as their six- to seven-member news staffs. For that great majority of stations in market ranks between those extremes, average turnover generally ran from about a fourth to a third. For radio, turnover was about twice as great in small markets as in major markets. Radio tended to average an opening for about one person during the year, regardless of market size. But that meant one of five-plus for major market radio news operations and upward of one out of only two persons in small-market operations.

Regionally, the East had somewhat lower TV news turnover than other parts of the United States. Radio news in the East had slightly more openings than in other areas, but these were for staffs averaging one person more than in cities outside the East. The net result was little difference in turnover rate -- about one-third across regions for radio.

Positions remaining unfilled at the time of the survey ranged from 5 to 10 percent for various market categories.

Of those persons hired during the preceding 12 months, about a fourth for television and a third for radio were just out of school. (See Table 2). About half came from other stations and a fifth from still other sources.

TV stations in the top 50 markets hired a lower percentage of their newcomers from just out of school. But taking their larger staffs into consideration, we find that the lower percentage still amounted to nearly

TABLE 2

Sources of Broadcast Newspersons Hired from Late 1976 to Late 1977, By Market Size and Region

	Schools	Other Stations	Other Sources	Total	Mean Hirings for Year	Number of Stations
Television	24%	55	21	100%	3.8	425
ADI 1-10	11%	72	17	100%	5.4	32
ADI 11-50	16%	70	14	100%	5.0	113
ADI 51-100	26%	50	24	100%	3.8	113
ADI 101-150	31%	45	24	100%	2.9	107
ADI 151-206	38%	41	21	100%	2,9	59
East	24%	53	24	101%	3.4	56
South	22%	61	17	100%	4.1	144
Midwest	28%	56	17	101%	3.6	131
West	20%	55	25	100%	4.0	94
Radio	30%	50	20	100%	1.0	455
Major Mkt	17%	67	17	101%	1.2	62
Large Mkt.	21%	57	21	99%	1.4	88
Medium Mkt.	33%	44	22	99%	.9	156
Small Mkt.	43%	29	29	101%	.7	149
East	23%	62	15	100%	1.3	88
South	30%	50	20	100%	1.0	141
Midwest	33%	33	33	99%	.9	140
West	22%	44	33	99%	.9	88

one fresh graduate as the average hired for the year. Smaller-market stations, with higher rates but smaller staffs, also hired only about one during the one-year period. So stations in all sizes of TV markets were actively hiring persons just out of school. Similarly, the percentage of jobs going to new graduates increased as market size decreased, but in raw numbers the average came to 2 to 5 tenths of one graduate per station in each market category.

Regional differences were minor. The Midwest showed a slight tendency to be the most receptive hunting ground for broadcast journalists just out of school.

Only half of the TV and a fourth of the radio stations had hired a newsperson fresh out of school in the previous 12 months. Table 3 shows that 30 percent of the TV newsrooms hired only one, 15 percent hired two, and 8 percent added three or more new graduates. In radio, about a fifth hired one and very few hired two or more.

Most of the major-market hiring of newspersons just out of school was done by relatively few stations. Many simply will not consider such an applicant. Only 28 percent of the TV stations in the 10 largest markets and 16 percent of the radio stations in markets of at least 1-million had hired newspersons just out of school in the previous 12 months.

By contrast, nearly half of the ADI 11-50 TV stations and about four-fifths in smaller markets had hired entry-level graduates. In radio, such hirings were reported by about a fourth of the stations in small, medium and large markets.

TABLE 3

Stations' Hiring of Broadcast Newspersons Just Out of School

by Market Size and Region

	Number Hired in Year				
	None	One	Two	3 & Up	Total
Television	47%	30	15	8	100%
ADI 1-10	72%	12	9	6	99%
ADI 11-50	55%	23	16	7	101%
ADI 51-100	42%	32	16	10	100%
ADI 101-150	40%	39	15	6	100%
ADI 151-206	37%	34	14	15	100%
East	57%	23	12	7	99%
South	47%	26	20	7	100%
Midwest	38%	40	12	10	100%
West	52%	26	13	9	100%
Radio	76%	19	4	1	100%
Major Market	84%	11	3	2	100%
Large Market	77%	16	7	0	100%
Medium Market	74%	21	4	2	101%
Small Market	74%	23	2	1	100%
East	77%	16	7	0	100%
South	76%	19	3	2	100%
Midwest	71%	25	4	0	100%
West	82%	14	2	2	100%

Regionally, again, differences were small. But the Midwest had the highest percentage of stations hiring new graduates. This may relate to broadcast journalism education's becoming prominent in the Midwest earlier than in other parts of the United States.

DISCUSSION

Broadcast journalism educators and their students should be aware of both the positive and negative implications of the staff turnover which has been growing in recent years. It means more frequent openings for new graduates. But, on the other side of the coin, it also means they are more likely to be moving around. This appeals to some individuals but not to others.

Not surprisingly, small-market news operations have the highest turnover and those in major markets the lowest. Salary ceilings for most positions in small-market operations are too low to hold most newspersons beyond a training period. After they have served their basic training in such a market, many move up to a larger market and later perhaps to a major market. In Wisconsin, for example, a number of newspersons over the years have moved down Lake Michigan -- from Green Bay to Milwaukee and later to Chicago. One explanation for the lower turnover in top-10 markets such as Chicago is that there are few if any substantially larger markets -- down the lake or up the coast.

Like earlier studies, this one showed that beginners have the best chance of being hired in a small, medium or moderately large market. It is in such markets, too, that they will gain the broadest experience -- not over-specializing at the start. In most cases, this

learn-to-do-everything training is to be recommended, especially if the young newsperson aspires to become a news director.

At the same time, educators need to keep in mind that major-market stations -- some of them, at least -- do hire substantial numbers of broadcast journalism graduates fresh out of school. For certain students -- for example, one who wants to specialize in urban reporting or one who primarily wants to write -- seeking a first job in a major market may be appropriate.

The fact that stations in major markets are hiring numerous news staff members right out of school speaks well for the universities training those students. It also recommends that we keep our sights high in our instruction -- being careful to familiarize students with large as well as small operations, and not assuming that the students all will -- or should -- start in places like Wausau or Valdosta. Some will choose -- and be able -- to start in Chicago or Atlanta instead.

In summary, there are entry-level opportunities in TV and radio news in markets of all sizes. Continuing high turnover rates should mean continued openings for those students with strong basic training, ability and drive. And while most would be well advised to aim at small to moderately large markets for first jobs, others might appropriately try for some of the usually more specialized positions available for beginners at major-market stations. It depends on the individual students -- and the jobs open at the time.

FOOTNOTES

1 Joseph G. Fulmer and Marvin R. Bensman, "Turnover in TV Industry Too High," Feedback, May 1978, pp. 17-19.

2 Vernon Stone, "News Directors and Problems Surveyed," RTNDA Communicator, March 1977, pp. 5-10.

3 Fulmer and Bensman.

4 Stone.

5 James D. Harless and Erik L. Collins, "TV Directors Hire Many Staffers from Campuses," Journalism Educator, October 1974, pp. 39-42.

6 Vernon Stone and Deborah Hayes, "Television News Needs, Finances and Staffing Are Surveyed," RTNDA Communicator, September 1975, pp. 8010.

7 Vernon A. Stone and James L. Hoyt, "Classroom and Newsroom Contact: A Survey Report," paper presented to Radio-Television Journalism Division, AEJ, at annual convention, University of Maryland, College Park, August 1976.